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## WHO IS CARRYING THE TEMPLE MENORAH? A JEWISH COUNTER-NARRATIVE OF THE ARCH OF TITUS SPOLIA PANEL

### Abstract

*The Arch of Titus, constructed circa 81 CE under the emperor Domitian, commemorates the victory of the general, then emperor Titus in the Jewish War of 66–74 CE. Located on Rome's Via Sacra, the Arch has been a "place of memory" for Romans, Christians and Jews since antiquity. This essay explores the history of a Jewish counter-memory of a bas relief within the arch that depicts the triumphal procession of the Jerusalem Temple treasures into Rome in 71 CE. At least since the early modern period, Jews—as well as British Protestants—came to believe that the menorah bearers of this relief represent Jews, and not Roman triumphadors. This essay addresses the history of this widespread belief, particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and continuing in contemporary Israel.*

### Keyword

*Arch of Titus, Zionist art, menorah, Jewish Folklore*

In memory of  
Professor Dov Noy  
גרות ציון דועקו וכבו

In 2010 the Israel Ministry of Education began distribution of a standardized on-line test to be administered in "secular" Hebrew-speaking government schools. Fifth-grade students were asked to read a Hebrew passage on the history of the menorah, and answer a series of multiple-choice comprehension questions.<sup>2</sup> In the test passage, the students are told that:

לזכר הניצחון שלהם, בנו הרומאים ברומא את "שער טיטוס" ועליו יצרו תבליט שבו נראים שבויים יהודים נושאים את המנורה על כתפיהם.

In memory of their victory, the Romans built in Rome "the Arch of Titus," upon which they created a panel that shows Jewish captives bearing the menorah on their shoulders.

One fifth-grader in a Jerusalem suburb, the child of a prominent Israeli scholar of Jewish folklore, questioned the test. She pointed out to the teacher that "My father says that the men are Roman soldiers, not Jews." Her teacher vehemently corrected the child, and the girl's answer was deemed incorrect.<sup>3</sup> Examples of the rereading of the arch are common across the contemporary Israeli and Jewish diaspora cultural/ideological spectrum.

Who is carrying the Jerusalem temple vessels in the Arch of Titus bas-reliefs? Any scholar of classical Greece and Rome or historian of Jewish antiquity will answer this question without missing a beat. The menorah panel illustrates the triumph of Titus in 70 CE, showing the spoils of Jerusalem carried into Rome by triumphant Roman soldiers—*triumphadors*—their heads bedecked with celebratory wreaths (fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> This identification not only fits with what we know of Roman triumphal parades, a rather stylized form of celebration of which quite a bit is known from literary and visual evidence, but also from the writings of

<sup>1</sup> "The lamps of Zion were quenched and extinguished," Z. M. Rabinovitz, ed., *The Liturgical Poetry of Rabbi Yannai*, (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1987), Num. 8:1, vol. 2: 37 (Hebrew). I am most grateful to Moti Benmelech, David Berger, Shulamith Berger and Yeshiva University Archives, Asher D. Biemann, Robert Bonfil, Nan Goodman and Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Jessica Della Russo, Helen C. Evans, Dror Eydar, Isaiah Gafni, Galit Hasan-Rokem, Margaret Olin, Jess Olson, Ira Rezak, Yonatan Shtencel, David Sperber, Ronit Steinberg, David Tartakover, Mel Wachs, Haim Weiss, Israel I. Yuval, and the late Jacob Birbaum and Tovia Preschel. I particularly appreciate Aharon Shevo, for his openhandedness in our conversation in his studio in Moshav Beit Gamliel, Israel, in July 2013 and my friend Alec Mishory, whose pioneering work in early Zionist visual culture guided me to this subject, and whose imprint may be felt throughout this essay. Yaakov M. Fine was my intrepid research assistant for this project.

<sup>2</sup> *Maytsav: Mivhan be-Ivrit le-Internet, Kitah Hey, Nusah Bet; Test 22*. State of Israel, Ministry of Education, 2010, accessed August 20, 2014: <http://meyda.education.gov.il/files/Rama/MeitzavIvritEeB.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Many thanks to Haim Weiss for this anecdote.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Beard, "The Triumph of Josephus," in *Flavian Culture: Culture, Image, Text*, eds. Anthony J. Boyle and William J. Dominik (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 543–558; Ida Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, Captives, and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111–118; Michael Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen. Beiträge zur Erschliessung hellenistischer und kaiserzeitlicher* (Mainz am Rhein: Zabern, 1983); Leon Yarden, *The Spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus: A Re-Investigation* (Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Rom, 1991).



Fig. 1. Menorah Panel of the Arch of Titus, c. 81 CE, Rome. (Arch of Titus Digital Restoration Project).

the Jewish/Roman (or is it Roman/Jewish?) historian Flavius Josephus himself, who describes the parade in considerable detail (*Jewish War* 7.118–157). For scholars of ancient Rome, the spoils panel of the arch, which was constructed in 81 CE by Emperor Domitian, shows Romans—their heads decorated with wreaths—bearing the heavy golden booty of the Jerusalem Temple into the Eternal City. If this is the case, why did the fifth-grade comprehension test describe “Jewish” menorah bearers? The identification is clearly at odds with the academic consensus—and the visible of this artifact.

The myth of the Jewish menorah bearers has a very long history. The legend of the Jewish menorah bearers first appeared in Early Modern Rome, where focusing on the Arch of Titus, Jewish antiquarian Gedaliah ibn Yahya inverted the power relationship between the subjugated Jews of Renaissance Rome and the less-than friendly majority culture.<sup>5</sup> It was developed by British

Protestants as part of a larger project to appropriate “biblical” history during the nineteenth century and asserted by *fin-de-siècle* Zionists as they sought to reset the relationship between Jews and Europe—and in doing so between Rome and Jerusalem. In contemporary Jewish and Israeli culture this “counter-memory” lives unnoticed just below the surface, and is invested with deep political and even apocalyptic significance. While the study of counter-memories associated with sites that historian Pierre Nora called *lieux de mémoire* is well established, most scholarship focuses upon the majority voice of the victors, and not on the minority voice—often that of the vanquished.<sup>6</sup> This essay traces the myth of the Jewish menorah bearers from its inception to the fifth-grade test with which I began. My goal in this study is to honor the memory of my teacher and mentor, Dov Noy, with a thick description of this folk tradition from its point of origin into our own world.

<sup>5</sup> Called by James C. Scott a “hidden transcript.” See his *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Nora, ed. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University

Press, 1996); Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory* 26 (Spring, 1989): 7–24; Asher D. Biemann, *Dreaming of Michelangelo: Jewish Variations on a Modern Theme* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

*The Jewish Menorah Bearers: From the Renaissance to the Nineteenth Century*

The earliest identification of the Arch of Titus menorah bearers as Jewish captives appears in an almost off-handed way in the writings of early modern historiographer Gedaliah Ibn Yahya's *Shalsholet ha-Kabbalah* (*The Chain of Tradition*), a treatise that appeared in Venice in 1587:<sup>7</sup>

ועשו לו שם טרואומפי נפלא על גבורות הזה כי רבה היה בעיניהם ביודעים במופת חותך שבאומות ובנו ברומה ציון גדול של אבן משכית הנקרא ארכו לסימן ומזכרת עולמית מגבורתו הזאת וציירו על הציזון ההיא תבנית כלי המקדש ואנשי האסורים ואני ראיתיו. וגם ראיתי בסילוניקי בשנת השכ"ח שהייתי שם כמוהו אבל אין בו ציור הכלים ויש קבלה אצלם שגם הוא נעשה לכבוד טיטוס כשעבר משם עם הגולה....

And they made for him there [in Rome] a marvelous triumph[al parade to honor] these mighty acts, for it [the victory] was great in their eyes, for they know absolutely that Israel is a strong nation. They built in Rome a large monument of carved stone, called an arch, as an eternal commemoration of his might. They illustrated on this monument the image of the Temple vessels and the captive men. I saw it....

The Arch of Titus is transformed by Ibn Yahya—himself closely associated with messianic pretender David Ha-Reuveni (d. 1535/1541) and his claims to command Jewish armies beyond the borders of Christendom—as a monument to the strength of the Jewish people.<sup>8</sup> Since Titus was forced to fight so strenuously to defeat the Jews (a war that did, in fact, take the Empire eight years to win), Ibn Yahya reasons, he merited this

triumphal arch. Thus, the “strong” Jewish captives are depicted in its bas-reliefs, and the shame that Jews experienced in relation to the arch inverted.<sup>9</sup>

The interpretation of the menorah bearers as Jewish occurs in no medieval or early modern Christian source of which I am aware, before it reappears in Protestant sources during the nineteenth century. This reemergence was likely because the power of the Roman Church—as successor of imperial Rome—was as patently obvious to Catholic pilgrims, who processed beneath the arch in celebration of the Church triumphant, as it was to modern classicists. Romans—and certainly not Jews—triumphantly carry the spoils of Jerusalem, their bearers retroactively “converted” to the service of the universal church. From the thirteenth century on much of the booty was believed to be stored in the papal Church of St. John of the Lateran, the “Sanctum Sanctorum.”<sup>10</sup>

The legend appears rather extensively in nineteenth century Protestant writings in English. There is no indication whether this association was drawn from an oral tradition that was known in Rome, or, possibly, through contact with Jews—or perhaps even an association made by the British themselves. Biblical antiquities were particularly significant for British religious self-understanding at this time, and my sense is that this reimagining of the Arch of Titus was part of this process.<sup>11</sup> It paralleled, for example, the “discovery” and development of an alternative to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher by Anglicans in Jerusalem, the so-called “Garden Tomb.”<sup>12</sup> Interest in the arch by Anglophone Protestants was consistent, with their general interest

<sup>7</sup> Gedaliah Ibn Yahya, *Shalsholet ha-Kabbalah* (Venice: Di Gara, 1585). I cite here from the critical edition, Jerusalem: Hotsa'at ha-Dorot ha-Rishonim ve-Korotom, 1962, 253.

On Ibn Yahya, see Abraham David, *The Historiographical Work of Gedalya Ibn Yahya Author of "Shalsholet ha-Kabbalah"* (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976) (Hebrew). The most significant presentation of this material was prepared by Tovia Preschel, “Sha'ar Titus be-Shirah,” *HaDoar* 53 (1973): 569 (Hebrew).

<sup>8</sup> Moti Benmelech, “History, Politics, and Messianism: David Ha-Reuveni's Origin and Mission,” *AJS Review* 35 (2001): 35–60; Benmelech, “The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel in Early Modern Jewish Eyes,” *Zion* 77 (2012): 491–527 (Hebrew).

<sup>9</sup> Amnon Linder, “The Jews Too Were Not Absent... Carrying Moses's Law on Their Shoulders: The Ritual Encounter of Pope and Jews from the Middle Ages to Modern Times,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009): 323–395.

<sup>10</sup> Sible de Blaauw, “The Solitary Celebration of the Supreme Pontiff: The Lateran Basilica as the New Temple in the Medieval Liturgy of Maundy Thursday,” in *Omnes Circumstantes*:

*Contributions towards a History of the People in the Liturgy Presented to Hermann Wegman on his Retirement*, eds. Charles Caspers and Marc Schneiders (Kampen: Kok, 1990), 132–136; Marie Thérèse Champagne, *The Relationship between the Papacy and the Jews in Twelfth-Century Rome: Papal Attitudes toward Biblical Judaism and Contemporary European Jewry*. (Ph.D. diss., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2005); Champagne, “Treasures of the Temple: The Jewish Heritage of Papal Rome in the Twelfth Century,” in *Aspects of Power and Authority in the Middle Ages*, eds. Brenda M. Bolton and Christine E. Meek (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 107–118; Ronald T. Ridley, *The Eagle and The Spade: Archaeology in Rome During the Napoleonic Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 95–99.

<sup>11</sup> Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799–1917, Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Kochav, “The Search for a Protestant Holy Sepulchre: the Garden Tomb in Nineteenth-century Jerusalem,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46.2 (1995): 278–301; Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land*, 76–78.

in things Biblical. The most important British Protestant study of the Arch of Titus was William Knight's *The Arch of Titus and the Spoils of the Temple* (1896), a work that was published by the Religious Tracts Society of London.<sup>13</sup> Uncharacteristically for this staid author, Knight polemicizes rather strongly against the notion of Jewish menorah bearers:

The sculptures . . . represent the spoils which were taken from the Temple. They are borne aloft by Roman soldiers, and not by Jewish captives, as some writers represent them; for they are crowned with laurel and they have in their hands the short and pointless spears. . . . They are also accompanied by persons of higher rank, with laurel crowns and branches, as before, and one of them carries some trappings on his breast.<sup>14</sup>

Knight does not say who identified the bearers of the temple spoils as “Jewish captives,” but a short search of contemporary literature shows just how common this notion was. In 1822 a London newspaper known as *The Gentleman's Weekly and Historical Chronicle* assumed the presence of Jews in the bas-reliefs: “The work is now too defaced to distinguish those figures with their hands tied behind their backs, representing Jewish prisoners, which is mentioned by some writers.”<sup>15</sup> This author read the bas-relief as an extension of Josephus's narrative, asserting with Josephus the centrality of Jewish prisoners to the triumphal parade—even though, in reality, he saw no Jewish prisoners in the relief. To do this, he had to assert that that the stone is “defaced.”

The image of the revived marble Judaeans became popular in British poetry during the nineteenth century. J. T. White's *The Arch of Titus* was the Oxford English Prize Poem for 1824, which imagines the vitiating Titus and the Jewish captives in the triumphal parade, bemoans the fate of the Jews, and anticipates their conversion to Christianity.<sup>16</sup> Irish poet Aubrey Thomas de Vere published “The Arch of Titus” in 1855,

a poem that was widely anthologized into the *fin de siècle* and included in a collection edited by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1877.<sup>17</sup> De Vere too assumed the Jewish identities of the figures on the Menorah panel:<sup>18</sup>

I STOOD beneath the Arch of Titus long;  
On Hebrew forms there sculptured long I pored;  
Till fancy, by a distant clarion stung,  
Woke; and me thought there moved that arch toward  
A Roman triumph. Lance and helm and sword  
Glittered; white coursers tramped and trumpets rung:  
Last came, car-borne amid a captive throng,  
The laurelled son of Rome's imperial lord.  
As though by wings of unseen eagles fanned  
The Conqueror's cheek, when first that arch he saw,  
Burned with the flush he strove in vain to quell.  
Titus! a loftier arch than thine hath spanned  
Rome and the world with empery and law;  
Thereof each stone was hewn from Israel!

It is fascinating that one of the many anthologies that include this poem went out of its way to correct the identification of the figures of the menorah panel, correctly describing them as the “laurelled victors,” indicating their identity as Roman.<sup>19</sup> Even with this error, the artistic merits of this poem apparently warranted its inclusion. Similarly, British/Australian poet Charles Joseph Latrobe composed a long reflection on the arch, lamenting the fate of the Jewish menorah bearers:<sup>20</sup>

The streams of age flow,  
And still the victor-train in stately march,  
With prancing coursers, threads the marble arch,  
And still the captives go,  
Bearing on high the seven-lamps divine,  
And all of Zion graced—the joy of PALANTINE.

Anticipating criticism from scholars like Knight, Latrobe is well aware that he was susceptible to

<sup>13</sup> William Knight, *The Arch of Titus and the Spoils of the Temple* (London: Religious Tracts Society, 1896).

<sup>14</sup> Knight, *The Arch of Titus*, 84.

<sup>15</sup> “Arch of Titus,” *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 92.1 (1822): 489 (489–91).

<sup>16</sup> J. T. White, “The Arch of Titus,” *The Classical Journal* 30 (1824): 173.

In a note to his “Behold the Arch of Titus,” John Edmund Reade, in *Italy: A Poem. With Historical and Classical Notes* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 447, distinguishes between Roman soldiers with laurel wreaths in our panel from Jewish slaves.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ed., *Poems of Place: Italy* (Boston: James D. Osgood, 1877), 2: 160.

<sup>18</sup> Aubrey Thomas de Vere, *Poems* (London: Burns and Lambert, 1855), 155.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Allen Ford, *Poems of History, By the Most Famous Poets of all Ages* (New York: William H. Shepard, 1883), 126.

<sup>20</sup> For more on Charles Joseph Latrobe, see Jill Eastwood, “La Trobe, Charles Joseph (1801–1875),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University*, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/latrobe-charles-joseph-2334/text3039>, (published in hardcopy 1967).

For more on the lament of the fate of the Jewish menorah bearers, see Charles Joseph Latrobe, “The Arch of Titus,” in *The Solace of Song, Short Poems Suggested by a Continental Tour, Chiefly in Italy* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1887), 45 (44–48).

“a charge of credulity” for accepting popular and pious identifications. He purposefully attempts to shield himself from attack, however, writing in the preface to his collection of poems that “He would leave it for others to determine the accuracy in all cases of particular traditions, premising that he has adopted none, but such as came within the range of possibilities.”<sup>21</sup>

In America, a pamphlet called *Rachel and Her Father at the Triumphal Arch of Titus* makes this claim as part of a conversionist tract—the stated purpose of which was to equip missionaries in their work with Jews.<sup>22</sup> The main protagonist, a Protestant evangelist, describes his empathy for Rachel and her father as the three of them stand at the arch, empathy that leads to their eventual conversion to Christianity:

... I thought of the scattered remnant of a people formerly so great, once so highly favored by God, but now wandering astray on earth in darkness and misery. Oh how much must the heart of a Jew mourn when circumstances bring him here, where he is compelled to see the representations of his captive brethren! I understood now, very well, why the Jews of Rome prefer to make a long circuit, so that they need not see the triumphal arch which reminds them of their fall and abasement...<sup>23</sup>

The origins of the notion that Jews avoided passing under the arch is unclear, but by the early nineteenth century, this custom had been adopted by the Jews of Rome.<sup>24</sup> Some of the literature seems to associate Jews bearing the menorah typologically with the “fact” that Jesus bore his own cross. Knight would have none of that, though he certainly believed—with all of the Christian authors that we have discussed—that the destruction of the Temple was a punishment for the rejection of Christ; fulfillment of Mark’s prophecy that “there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down” (Mark 13:2).<sup>25</sup>

The first modern Jewish source of which I am aware that participates in the myth is a poem by Giuseppe Prospero Revere (d. 1889), a secularized Italian Jew, described as an “Italian poet and patriot.”<sup>26</sup> In a revolutionary poem entitled “il Arco de Tito,” Revere writes<sup>27</sup>

Tito Vespasian! L’infame clade  
Che la pontifical Solima everse,  
E di mestizia secolar everse  
De’miei maggiori l’ilari contrade,

Sull’arco tuo che poco cielo invade  
**Mostra le mie tribù serve e disperse;**  
Ma un altro arco su quello il volo aderse  
Che per furor di tempi mai non cade.

Gli è l’arco del pensier che vince i marmi,  
I bronzi sfida e sino a Dio si leva,  
A quel Dio che al dolor sacrava un figlio,

L’arco trionfator de bieco esiglio,  
Che alla mia schiatta ministrava l’armi  
Onde or le secolari onte disgreva.

Titus Vespasian! The infamous destruction  
That the pontifical Suleiman sends forth  
Of hard/melancholic mention over the centuries  
By my ancestors the contented nation

Your arch that takes up so little space  
**Shows my tribes as slaves and dispersed**  
But another arch upon which the flight of thought rises  
Facing the ravages of time but does not fall

It is the arch of memory that triumphs over marble.  
It faces off against the bronzes and rises up to God.  
To that God who gave up a son to great suffering.

The triumphant arch of impending exile,  
That to my imprecise actions provides the weapons  
Until the weight of the ancient shameful deeds it now  
makes lighter.

<sup>21</sup> Latrobe, *The Solace of Song*, 6–7.

<sup>22</sup> John H. Bernheim, trans. (?), *Rachel and Her Father at the Triumphal Arch of Titus* (Newburyport, Mass., privately printed, 1847). Bernheim claims that the tract is based upon French and German versions, which I have not yet discovered.

<sup>23</sup> Bernheim, *Rachel and Her Father*, 8–9.

<sup>24</sup> The author notes that “The Ciceroni [tour guides] of Rome are fond of repeating to every lightening traveler that the Jews ftudiouffly avoid paffing under the arch of Titus, and a narrow paffage on one side on the arch is pointed out as having been purchafed by the Jews for the convenience of communication without difgrace or fcruple. But the laft time I was at Rome I was affured by several

perfons of veracity, either natives of, or long refident at, the city, that this affertion is a groundless fable perpetuated chiefly by the Ciceroni and Valets de Place . . .” “Hints toward a New Edition of Mr. Gray’s Tour,” *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle* 77.1:37–39 (1795): 289. For a more detailed history of this “Jewish custom,” see Tovia Preschel, “Minhag Yehudei Roma,” *HaDoar* 42 (1962): 538 (Hebrew).

<sup>25</sup> Knight, *The Arch of Titus*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Giorgio Romano, “Giuseppe Prospero Revere,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 14: 126–127.

<sup>27</sup> Giuseppe Revere, *Osiride* (Rome: Forzani, 1879), 108, translation by Jessica Della Russo.

This poem was not addressed to a Jewish audience, but to a broadly educated Italian secularizing readership. Revere must have assumed that the identification of the figures in the arch's bas-reliefs as Jews was widely known.<sup>28</sup>

*The Jewish Menorah Bearers and Pre-State Zionism*

There is no obvious direct link between Protestant identification of Jewish menorah bearers and Jewish authors or informants, though it is not unlikely that such communication took place. The kinds of interactions imagined—if in a rather stereotypical way—in *Rachel and Her Father at the Triumphal Arch of Titus* was one possible vehicle. Tour guide lore is another, and print media a third possibility. Within distinctly learned Jewish contexts in Eastern Europe, the interpretation first seen in Ibn Yahya's writings found broad currency in Hebrew-speaking circles. *Shalshet ha-Kabbalah* was reprinted many times for Hebrew readers: in Zolkiew (now Zhovkva, Ukraine) in 1804; Lvov in 1864; and in Warsaw in 1877, 1889, 1902 and 1928.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the mode of transmission and dissemination, lots of people "knew" that the menorah bearers were Jews.

The legend of the Jewish menorah bearers gained popularity in print among Hebrew-reading Jews by the 1890s. Significantly, the first Hebrew newspaper article to discuss the arch's menorah relief appeared relatively late, in the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) newspaper *HaZefira* on 27 November 1882.<sup>30</sup> This article celebrated that this panel could now be seen broadly due to new technology. The author, editor Haim Zelig Slonimsky, was well aware that the menorah bearers were Romans—though later articles in the Hebrew press routinely identify the bearers as Jews. Photographic dissemination certainly was important for the development of Jewish interest in the arch, as the menorah panel became a recurrent subject in the Hebrew press and belles-lettres.

Perhaps the most authoritative identification of the menorah bearers as Jews appeared in a popular Jewish publication produced in London in 1900, *Israel: The Jewish Magazine*. An illustrative photograph appeared in an article by Moses Gaster, and was called simply "The Menorah." Gaster was perhaps the most important Zionist *Wissenschaft* scholar of his era—a folklorist whose interests ranged from Romanian folklore to Jewish magic to Samaritanism to midrash.<sup>31</sup> He was also the rabbi, the *hakham* of the prestigious Bevis Marks congregation in London, and a major Cultural Zionist leader—so his claims regarding the menorah would not have been taken lightly. Gaster framed his piece around an October visit to Rome for an academic conference:

Tradition will have it that the figures which are represented as carrying the sacred vessels in the triumphal procession of Titus, are not the conventional types due to the skill and inventive power of the artist who cut them in the stone, but that they are taken from life. They are the very leaders of the Captivity, who were chosen to carry the spoils for the delectation of the Roman rabble. And how life-like are these figures! Nothing of the abject fear of the man who knows the terrible fate that is awaiting him on the morrow. Cold disdain speaks from every feature—a proud bearing as it behoves the man who made Rome tremble with all her legions and all her power. At the same time the humble pride in his face for having been chosen to carry the precious vessels of the desolate Sanctuary, and the awe in his uplifted eye, the deep reverence which he feels for that very sacred burden. Picked men they were, whom Titus selected out of the seventeen thousand captives to bring with him to Rome and to follow in his triumph. Was it perhaps Simon ben Gioras himself whom this central figure represented, or one of those heroic Zealots and Hassidim who paid in their thousands with their life for their unbounded patriotism?

Whilst musing on this spectacle I suddenly saw that the figures on the Arch had lost their stony appearance; they were walking and carrying their burdens. The stillness which had reigned hitherto had given way to tremendous

<sup>28</sup> The myth of the Jewish menorah bearers appears in recent publications of Museo Ebraico di Roma though it is not clear to me whether this represents a local tradition or is borrowed from the broader Jewish/Israeli legend. See Daniela Di Castro, *From Jerusalem to Rome and Back: The Journey of the Menorah from Fact to Myth*. Exhibition catalog (Rome: Museo Ebraico di Roma, 2008), 1–2; Di Castro, *Treasures of the Jewish Museum of Rome: Guide to the Museum and its Collection*. (Rome: Museo Ebraico di Roma, 2010), 37.

<sup>29</sup> Editions include: Amsterdam: Asher Anshil ben Elieser ye-Yisakhar Ber ben Avraham Elieser, 1696; Lvov: Y. A. Shtand, 1864; Warsaw: P. Levenzohn 1877; Warsaw: B. Munk, 1899; Warsaw: A. Kahana, 1902, 1928.

<sup>30</sup> "Tsiur Atiq Yomin Mizkhronot Yemei Qedem," *HaZefira*, November 27, 1882.

<sup>31</sup> Măriuca, Stanciu, "Moses Gaster: Landmarks of an Intellectual Itinerary," *Studia Hebraica* 4 (2004): 75–87; Eli Yassif, "Moshe Gaster—Porets Derekh be-Folklor u-ve-Ma'adei ha-Yehadut," *Peamim* 100 (2004): 113–123.

shouting. The ruins on the Palatine had disappeared. The palaces of the Caesars were standing there in all their glory. The street of which I had been the solitary occupant was thronged with a multitude that grew every minute. The road was lined with Roman soldiers, and a long procession was winding its way from the Palatine and from the Via Olympia to the very place where I had been standing. An eager crowd surged in the streets, whilst an immense multitude occupied every place where they might stand, for the triumphal procession was about to pass and a show to be exhibited, the like of which the people at that time had not seen. All the spoils of the East gathered by Vespasianus and Titus were to be carried along. Images of gods, of costly material, wonderful for size and workmanship, hangings of the rarest purples with Babylonian embroideries, pageants of three and four stories high covered with cloth of gold, the various episodes of war represented on them. On the top of every one of these pageants the commander of the city that had been taken, just as he was captured, many ships, and a vast multitude of other spoil. Vespasian and the stunted Titus, crowned with laurels and clothed with purple robes, came along, loudly acclaimed by the spectators.

A sudden hush fell upon this gathering when the last portion of this triumphal procession appeared. Clothed in garments, in order to cover the hardships which they had endured, there appeared the Jewish captives, among them Simon ben Gioras and Johanan of Giskala, the former with a rope round his neck, and with them other Jewish captives carrying aloft the spoils from the Temple—the golden Candlestick, the golden Table, and the Law. These made the greatest figure of all. The shout died out on the lips of the Romans, an awe unspeakable seemed to have seized them when they beheld these remarkable spoils from Judea, so unlike those of any other city or nation. The tall, gaunt figures of the bearers heightened the impression, and in the stillness which suddenly ensued I heard a voice speaking to me, as from afar, a faint voice reaching my ear and saying, “Follow us!” At the same time I felt lifted off my feet and pushed into the midst of the road. The crowd which surrounded me did not seem to notice me, and I followed in the triumphal procession, unheeded and unmolested. The way was not long. We had soon reached the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, where they expected to hear the news of the human sacrifice which the Romans, according to ancient custom, were wont to bring on such occasions. The sacrifice selected on this occasion was this very Simon ben Gioras, the General of the Jews, spared by Titus for this purpose. The multitude shouted for joy when the tidings reached them, and the Emperors withdrew to the Palace, where the spoils were deposited.

I meanwhile followed the Jewish captives, and found myself suddenly in a small underground room, the only

entrance to which consisted of an iron grating that served as door, for light and air. . . .

Gaster proceeds with a discussion between the Jewish captives in their prison beneath the Colosseum before their dispatch to the games. He imagines that a Zealot leader, “Johanan of Giskala”—(generally referred to as John of Giscala, or Gush Halav today), had been the main menorah bearer:

“Into Captivity? Never! True, we are their captives, but only our bodies belong to them, not our Light, not our Law. Whilst walking in that procession it was borne upon me that we are the conquerors, and they the captives. I felt the ground shake under my feet, though I scarcely felt the weight of the Menorah; it seemed to have been supported by hands of angels. I saw the palaces sway to and fro, the temples shook and trembled, and their columns seemed as if a terrible storm was raging, and shaking them as the trees in the forest. The gods were falling from their pedestals, and the statues were hurled to the ground, at the sight of our Menorah. I felt that the fire which they had sought to extinguish was now being kindled in the heart of the whole Jewish nation, that the light once lit by my forefather, Judah, the Hashmonean [*sic*], in this very Menorah which I had upon my shoulders, had spread throughout the wide world, had kindled a great fire, which consumed all the greatness of this heathen and cruel Rome. The victor brought in his infatuation, to make a show of it in his triumph, the very instrument of his destruction and that of his empire, little dreaming that our triumph will outlast his and all his coadjutors. This Colosseum, where we will pay with our life for our faith in Him who is the God of our fathers and the God of our descendants for untold generations, who is a God of justice and mercy—this Colosseum will crumble to pieces, the proud palaces and temples will be leveled to the ground, a mere ruin will mark the ancient site; but the light of this, our Menorah, will never be extinguished.

Gaster imagines the emotion of the Jewish captives and weaves the images of the relief with Josephus’s description of the event. In this fantasy, Gaster is swept up into the scene, joining the ancient procession and becoming as one with the Jewish captives who somehow recognize him as a fellow Jewish patriot. Their “faint voice” inviting Gaster to “follow us” is not just a clarion call, but a suspension of distance between the Jewish viewer and this ancient exemplar of Roman art. His projection of the modern refrain that Rome will fall while Israel rises into the mouths of the ancient menorah bearers makes the story all the more powerful. Finally, Gaster affords us a hint regarding a source of his vision—the effects of changing light over the surface of the arch panel. He writes:

It was the crack of a driver's whip that broke upon the silence of the spot. A Cardinal was just then passing in his carriage out of Rome into the Campagna, and had to go round the Arch, as the way underneath is now closed to passengers. It was his driver who woke me to the reality of the situation. I had apparently dreamt. So I turned again to the figures on the stone. The shadows of the night had been gathering meanwhile, and had enveloped everything with their gloom, and yet do I believe to have seen their limbs move ere they hardened again into stone, and to have caught a ray of that flaming eye ere it was covered, and again became extinct. Across the centuries I had felt the living breath of our heroes and martyrs, and their words were ringing in my ears when I turned my steps homewards. Darkness was now complete, but slowly, one after the other, the Hanukah lamps were lit on the deep blue sky of Italy, and soon the Hanukah lamps will be lit in the myriads of houses of the children of Israel—"The old Menorah."

Gaster, the sophisticated folklorist and editor of Jewish folk literature must certainly have been aware that he was forging a new Jewish tale to be integrated into the lives of his modernizing community. Having read much of Gaster's oeuvre, it is difficult for me to believe that he was not self-reflectively developing the myth of the menorah bearers for a community where this belief was perhaps already widespread—though it is hard to know. The story written by Rabbi Gaster is framed with an air of great sobriety in the pages of *Israel*, accompanying a photograph of our author as "The Rev. The Haham (Dr. M. Gaster)." The story was intended to be read during the festival of Hanukkah, a holiday that was quickly being reformed as a celebration of Jewish modernism and nationalism.<sup>32</sup>

In a similar way, Harry Austryn Wolfson, later the great Harvard scholar of Jewish philosophy, but at this point an undergraduate at Harvard College and an avid Cultural Zionist, deployed the Jewish menorah bearers in a Hebrew poem that he recited at the Menorah Society dinner in Boston in 1909.<sup>33</sup> I have no sense whether Wolfson believed the myth, or whether he was engaging a widely believed folk myth. My guess, however, is that at this early stage in his career, the former was the case. While the original Hebrew appears

to be lost, an English translation by classmate Hugo M. Kallen was widely distributed:<sup>34</sup>

#### The Arch of Titus

Crumbling, age-worn, in Rome the eternal  
Stands the arch of Titus' triumph,  
With its carven Jewish captives  
Stooped before the holy Menorah.

And each nightfall, when the turmoil  
Of the Petrine clangor ceaseth,  
Seven flames the arch illumine,  
Mystic burnings, glowing strangely.

Then cast off their graven shackles  
Judah's sons of beaten marble;  
Living step they from the ruin  
Living stride they to the Jordan.

They are healed in its waters,  
Till the freshness of each dawning;  
Then resume their ancient sorrow,  
Perfect marble, whole and holy.

Dust of dust the wheeling seasons,  
Grind that mighty archèd splendor,  
Raze the Gaul and raze the Roman,  
Grind away their fame and glory,

The shackled Jews alone withstand them,  
Stooped before the holy Menorah.

Wolfson, like Gaster before him, imagines the Jews of the arch coming to life. For Wolfson, this happens each evening, when the menorah is set ablaze, before returning to stone with morning's light. These are loosely related to the legends of both Pygmalion and the Golem. A significant parallel, with deep roots simultaneously in secularizing Jewish sources and in Enlightenment fascination with Rome, is found in Jewish reflection on Michelangelo's *Moses* (c. 1513–1515) at San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome. This statue had been a Jewish destination since shortly after it was installed in the church. A deep literature among secularizing Western Jews—including Revere and Sigmund Freud (both of whom showed a particular interest in the arch) imagines a kind of Mosaic Pygmalion that Asher D. Biemann aptly calls "the Dream of the

<sup>32</sup> See François Guesnet, "Chanukah and its Function in the Invention of a Jewish-heroic Tradition in Early Zionism, 1880–1900," in *Nationalism, Zionism and Ethnic Mobilization of the Jews in 1900 and Beyond*, ed. Michael Berkowitz (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 227–245; Diane Ashton, *Hanukkah in America: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), and the bibliography there.

<sup>33</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, "The Arch of Titus," trans. H. M. Kallen, *The Menorah Journal* 1.4 (1915): 201; Leo W. Schwarz, *Wolfson of Harvard: Portrait of a Scholar* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), 28–29, 260.

<sup>34</sup> This document is not preserved among Wolfson's papers at Harvard University Library.



Moving Moses.”<sup>35</sup> This conception provides a significant Jewish parallel to Gaster’s and Wolfson’s imaginings. Jewish attachment to both allowed secularizing Jews to imagine roots among the most important monuments of the Eternal City, mediating their personal struggles between what was referred to as “Hellenism,” that is, Westernization, and “Hebraism”—their Jewish identities.<sup>36</sup> This instinct also informed the “Menorah Men,” and thus their focus on in the Arch of Titus menorah at the first Menorah banquet, and in the first issue of *The Menorah Journal*. With Gaster, Wolfson clearly adapted and transformed the image of the revived stone Judaeans that was popularized by the poems of J. T. White and particularly by de Vere, giving it a positive Jewish modernizing/Zionist spin—Wolfson in both modern Hebrew and English.<sup>37</sup> Wolfson’s translated poem was included in American-Jewish anthologies of poetry in subsequent years.<sup>38</sup>

The identification of the menorah bearers was contested by historically-minded Jewish authors who read deeply in classics, as it had been by Knight and other nineteenth century Anglophones. As early as the 1890–1899, the Hebrew edition of Heinrich Graetz’s *Geschichte der Juden*, called *Divre Yemei Yisrael*, translated by Shaul Pinchas Rabinowitz and commented upon by Avraham Harkavy, tried to use the authority of Graetz’s work to stamp out the legend.<sup>39</sup> Rabinowitz and Harkavy added a line to Graetz’s opus in Hebrew that does not appear in either the German original nor in the English translation: ולפני מרכבת הנצחון עברו בסך בני חיל רומא מעותרים בזרי תפארה ונושאים כלי הקדש “before the victory chariot passed Roman soldiers adorned with wreaths of glory and carrying the holy vessels.”<sup>40</sup> In a fascinating turn, Abraham (Adolf) Berliner, mentioned the myth with great pathos in an article in *HaZefira*, recalling his first visit to Rome in 1873:<sup>41</sup>

עברתי על פני קשת טיטוס בערב יום השבת לקראת ערב, ראיתי את המחוקה על העמודים פני אבותינו האומללים אשר הלכו בלא כח לפני רודף עמומים בכלי קדשם וענפי תמר קלועים בשערות ראשיהם לשוות הוד והדר על נצחון האויב. אז הפחתי את פני ולא יכולתי להתאפק מבכי.

I passed before the Arch of Titus on the eve of the Sabbath, toward evening, and I saw effaced erased from the columns the faces of our pitiful ancestors who walked without strength before the persecutor, burdened with their holy vessels, branches of palm woven in their hair to give glory and majesty for the victory of the enemy. Then, I turned my face aside, unable to hold back tears.

By the time he published his *Geschichte der Juden in Rom von der ältesten Zeit bis zur Gegenwart* (2050 Jahre) for a more general readership in 1893, however, Berliner seems to have abandoned this distinctly Jewish legend, explaining to his audience that the menorah is borne by Romans—with no mention of the Jewish menorah bearers!<sup>42</sup>

Another example is American Hebraist Judah David Eisenstein, who waxed theological in his published diary about his visit to Rome, in 1926, and never stopped believing that the menorah bearers were Jews:

והתבוננתי ביחוד על השער הנושן הנקרא קשת טיטוס (ארקו די טיטוס) אשר עליו מחוקים... ומצוירים משני צדדיו מחזה לעומת מחזה המלך טיטוס ושריו עליזי גאווה וכלי הקדש שבזוז מהיכל ה', ותמונת היהודים השבויים על כותלי ותקרת השער. פני השבויים נראים קבצו פארור וצלמות נסוכה עליהם. עדה המצבה הזאת על אכזריות הרומים הפראים ותגרת יד הצורר טיטוס, ולנו היא מזכרת תוגה של חורבן בית המקדש ואבדון ממשלת עמנו. קשת הנצחון הזאת תעורר בנו רגשות שונות, רגש צער על שברנו הגדול לפני אלפים שנים ורגש שמחה לראות כי טיטוס וכל הרומים אבדו מן הארץ ולא נשאר מהם רק זכרם וקשת הנצחון מהפכה למצבה על קברם ואנחנו חיים וקימים היום. ותקוותינו חזקה שהגיע אתחלתא דגאלתא ועוד מעת תעמוד קשת בענן להזכיר לנו ברית ראשונים, ברית ה' עם אבות עולם להנחיל ארץ חמדה צבי לכל הארצות לעם סגולתו.

<sup>35</sup> On Revere and Michelangelo’s *Moses*, see Biemann, *Dreaming of Michelangelo*, 65–69. On Freud and the *Moses* sculpture, Biemann, 15, 28, 38–39, 41, 51–53, 56–57, 60–65, 100. On Freud and both the *Moses* and the Arch of Titus, Mary Bergstein, *Mirrors of Memory: Freud, Photography and the History of Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 111–114. Biemann, *Dreaming of Michelangelo*, 37–77.

<sup>36</sup> See Bergstein, *Mirrors of Memory*, 113–114. This dichotomy between “Judaism” and “Hellenism” was a leitmotif in modern constructions of Judaism. See Tessa Rajak, “Judaism and Hellenism Revisited,” *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome: Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3–10.

<sup>37</sup> Schwarz, *Wolfson*, 28, closes the loop, comparing the prose of Wolfson’s English version to Longfellow.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>39</sup> Heinrich Graetz, *Divre Yemei Yisrael*, tr. Saul P. Rabinowitz, suppl. notes by Abraham (Albert) Harkavy (Warsaw: Alapin, 1890–1899) (Hebrew).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 137.

<sup>41</sup> Abraham Berliner, “Roma,” *HaZefira*, May 12, 1885. See also X., “Unter dem Titusbogen in Rom. (Aus einem römischen Tagebuch),” *Ost und West* 1 (1901): 515–516, which assumes the Jewish identity of the menorah bearers.

<sup>42</sup> Abraham Berliner, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom von der ältesten Zeit bis zur Gegenwart* (2050 Jahre), (Frankfurt: Kaufmann, 1893), 108–109.

... I especially reflected on that ancient arch known as the Arch of Titus, upon which are carved and portrayed opposite one another the King Titus and his ministers overflowing with mirthful pride [on one side], the holy vessels that were plundered from the house of the Lord and the image of the captive Jews on the walls and the ceiling of the arch. The faces of the Jews are darkened with gloom and the shadow of death is spread over them [emphasis added]. This monument is witness to the cruelty of the barbarous Romans and the burning hand of the oppressor Titus. For us, it is a reminder of the tragedy of the destruction of the Temple and loss of our [self-] rule. This triumphal arch awakens within us differing feelings—a feeling of sorrow over our great defeat two thousand years ago and a feeling of gladness to see that Titus and all the Romans have disappeared from the earth, and that all that remains of them is their memory. The triumphal arch has become a monument over their tomb, and we are alive and well today. Our hope is strong that the “beginning of redemption” has arrived, and soon an arch in the clouds [literally “rainbow” following Gen 9:12–17] will rise up to remind us of the covenant with our ancestors; the covenant of the Lord with the fathers of eternity [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob] to give the most beautiful of all lands [after Jeremiah 3:9] to his chosen people.<sup>43</sup>

This homily follows the entry on the Arch of Titus in the widely read *Ozar Yisrael: An Encyclopedia of All Matters Concerning Jews and Judaism* (1911), edited and published by Eisenstein.<sup>44</sup> This article—which was easily accessible to young Hebrew readers like Harry Wolfson—cites the myth of the Jewish menorah bearers without qualification, even though none of the academic studies cited by him make this claim, nor did *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, to which he was a contributor.<sup>45</sup>

The depth of identification between Zionist leaders and the “Jews” of the arch is expressed in a 1926 letter sent by Haim Arlosoroff (d. 1933), a member of the *yishuv* delegation to the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission, to his wife Sima. Visiting in

the same year as Eisenstein, Arlosoroff presents an intentionally thick portrayal (חושית-ציורית) of a recent whirlwind visit to Rome, which climaxed his pilgrimage to the arch:<sup>46</sup>

יותר מכל שהיתי לפני שער טיטוס, אף דיברתי שם עם לבי. הנה אני שולח לך בזה מראות אחדים של שער זה, שיכולים לתת מושג גם על הפרורם בכללו. את שער הניצחון הזה הקים "הסינט והעם של רומי לטיטוס האלוהי", לאחר שהכניע, במלחמה ארוכה וקשה, את ארץ-יהודה והבקיע את ירושלים. "יהודה השבויה" (Judaea capta)—כך חקק על מטבעות-הזכרון שיעק. על שטחו הפנימי של שער-הניצחון—שני גילופים, המציירים את כניסתו החגיגית של טיטוס לרומי, בשובו מן המלחמה: בצד האחד—עלמות שבוייה, בצד השני—שבויים מצבא-ישראל הנשאים את כלי-הקודש שנלקחו מבית-המקדש בירושלים. כמדומני, בתהלוכת-הניצחון היה גם שמעון בר-גוריאן. ואלי גם יוחנן מגוש-חלב. אבותינו. מי היו אלה? מה היתה מהותם? מה היתה עקשנותם? גאונם? כוחם? האם אנחנו הננו כמוהם? מה עבר עלינו מאז? מה אנו עושים כיום? האין רומי חזקה גם כיום? העולם תקף—כולי עלמא תקיפים—ואנחנו נרמסים תחת כפות רגליהם רמוסים ובכל-זאת חיים וקיימים? כלום יש גאון בחיים הללו? האם לא תם ונשלם מפעלנו? אך די לי לדבר על זה.

Most of all I tarried before the Arch of Titus, and there I pondered. I am sending you a few images of this arch, which will give also a general sense of the Forum. This triumphal arch was built by “the Senate and People of Rome to the divine Titus” after he defeated, in a long and difficult war the land of Judah and took Jerusalem. “Judaea Capta”—this is what he engraved on the memorial coins that he minted. On the inner surface of the triumphal arch are two reliefs, which portray Titus’ festive entrance to Rome when he returned from the war: on one side—captive maidens, on the other side—captives from the army of Israel carrying the sacred vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. I believe that Simon son of Giora was in the victory parade, and perhaps and John of Gush Halav.

Our ancestors! Who were they? What was the substance? What was their stubbornness? Their genius? Their power? Are we like them? What has happened to us since then? What do we do now? Is not Rome still strong today? The world is forceful—all the world is forceful—and we are crushed under their feet, trampled but still alive? Is there not genius in this life? Have we not completed our task? I have spoken enough of this. . . .

<sup>43</sup> Judah D. Eisenstein, *Otsar Zikhronotai: Autobiography and Memoirs; A Diary of Important Jewish Events since My Arrival in New York in 1872 with a View Backward to the First Jewish Settlement in 1654 (Yoman)* (New York: J. D. Eisenstein, 1929), 182 (Hebrew).

<sup>44</sup> Judah D. Eisenstein, “Titus,” in *Ozar Yisrael: An Encyclopedia of All Matters Concerning Jews and Judaism*, New York: Hebrew Encyclopedia Publishing, 5: 21 (Hebrew).

<sup>45</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–1906).

<sup>46</sup> Haim Arlosoroff, Letters, Letter from Naples, 14.2.26, *Project Ben Yehuda*, accessed May 8, 2015, <http://benyehuda.org/arlosoroff/047.html>.

Arlosoroff identifies the female figures of the Titus panel as Jewish women, associating them with the personifications of Judaea Capta coins. Arlosoroff lamented the contemporary state of the Jews to that of the Jews on the bas-reliefs—a description that is so precise in its identifications that it reminds of Gaster's story, written a quarter of a century earlier. What for Gaster was a myth in the making, was fact for Arlosoroff.

Perhaps most significant for modern Israeli culture, the legend was purveyed as fact by Joseph Klausner, an important early faculty member of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and noted public intellectual. Klausner was a kind of bridge scholar between the *fin de siècle* and the British mandatory period, who adhered to his earlier, rather insular methods developed as a leader of the Cultural Zionism movement even as historiography in Jewish Palestine developed far beyond the model initiated by Ahad ha-Am. Klausner, like many *fin de siècle* Zionist thinkers, was absorbed into the Revisionist Zionist movement by the 1930s. He discussed the Jewish bearers of the menorah on two separate occasions. In his 1946 memoir, significantly called *הגאולה והתחייה לקראת דרכי לקראת התחייה והגאולה* *My Path to Rebirth and Redemption*, Klausner describes how “sick and weak” he was when he first visited the Arch during a trip to Italy in 1928—just two years after Eisenstein and Arlosoroff:

הדבר הראשון, שהלכנו לראות ברומי, היה כמובן, "קשת טיטוס", Arco di Tito. את המצויר עליה, שאין לי צורך לתאר כי מי מקוראי דברי אלה לא ראה את צורתה באיזה חיבור היסטורי מתאים?— היכרתי מתוך ספרים את ציורה המדויק ביותר: ואף-על-פי-כן קשה לי לתאר התרגשותי כשעמדתי לפני "הקשת" והסתכלתי בפרצופים, שבהם קיים רומיים יותר מיהודיים, של גיבורי ישראל שבויים והמובלים בקולרים ובציורים שם המנורה בעלת שבעת הקנים והשולחן שם לחם-הפנים ששדדו הרומאים מבית מקדשנו השרוף... ונפשי סערה מאד על ענויי-גוף נוספו חבלי נשמה.

The first thing that we went to see in Rome, was, of course, the “Arch of Titus,” Arco di Tito. I have no need to describe what is illustrated upon it, for who among the readers of these words has not seen its image in some appropriate history book? I had known its form very precisely from books. *Even still, it is hard for me to*

*describe my feelings when I stood before “the Arch” and I looked at the faces—which look more Roman than Jewish—of the heroes of Israel captive and carried forward in [prisoner/slave] collars. Illustrated are the menorah of seven branches and the table of the showbread that the Romans stole from our burnt Temple... My soul was extremely turbulent owing to my physical afflictions, and to this was added emotional suffering.*<sup>47</sup>

Observing the arch reliefs, Klausner seems perplexed that the faces of the “Jews” appear to “look more Roman than Jewish.” Racial assumptions regarding Jewish features were common in his day, and some even projected the pseudo-science of the day into ancient art—including the Arch of Titus. The myth was assumed, for example, in an Italian Zionist publication of 1902, which discusses “I tipi semitici su l’arco di trionfo di Tito,” (“the Semitic type of the triumphal Arch of Titus”).<sup>48</sup> The text asserts a physiognomic connection between the “Jews” of the arch and those of his own time “al passante par riconoscere degli ebrei contemporanei,” (“the passerby will recognize contemporary Jews”). Similarly, a bust at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen was similarly identified by a Jewish scholar as a fellow Jew, first as a “Jewish youth” and then as Josephus himself based upon supposed racial features (that is, a big nose). This identification continues mostly in anti-Semitic literature, but also in Israel.<sup>49</sup> Not “seeing” the racial signs of Jews in the arch for himself, and likely in response to the decline of racial theory as an operative category in the aftermath of World War II, Klausner drops this racial explanation in his 1949 opus, *The History of the Second Temple* (ההסטוריה של הבית השני), where he takes a different tactic:

קשת טיטוס שנשתמרה ברומי עד היום, היהודים לא היו... עוברים דרך בה עד הימים האחרונים, מצויירים שבויי יהודה, בעלי תלבושת רומיים, שנושאים חוץ מהשולחן והמנורה עוד גם את חצוצרות התרועה.

The Arch of Titus is preserved in Rome to this day. The Jews did not pass through it until recently. It is illustrated with images of Judean captives, wearing Roman costume, who carry, besides the table and the menorah, also the horns.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Klausner, *My Path to Rebirth and Redemption: Autobiography (1874–1944)*, (Tel Aviv: Massada, 1946), 265 (Hebrew).

<sup>48</sup> “Onoranze Conigliani,” *L’Idea Sionista: Revista Mensile de la Movimento Sionista* 2 (1902): 38 (36–39), accessed August 20, 2014, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00000169/00002>.

<sup>49</sup> Steven Fine, “How Do You Know a Jew When You See One? Reflections on Jewish Costume in the Roman World,” in *Fashioning Jews: Clothing, Culture and Commerce*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspoon (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press,

2013), 19–27. For a late antique example, Helen C. Evans, “The Restored Section of the Petrine Frieze Sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Document of Early Misinterpretations of Christian Iconography,” in *Akten des Symposiums »Frühchristliche Sarkophage«, Marburg, 30.6.–4.7.1999*, ed. Guntram Koch (Mainz: Verlag Phillip von Zabern, 2002), 93–97.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Klausner, *The History of the Second Temple* (Jerusalem: Ahiasaf, 1949), 4: 279–280 (Hebrew).

Klausner is so convinced that the bearers of the temple vessels are Jews, that he puts aside the fact that the subjects are dressed as Romans, look like Romans, and do not even conform to the way he imagines Jews. He even imagines “[prisoner/slave] collars” that do not exist (though he is probably reacting to the heavy collars of the tunics, which appear all the more heavy in black and white photographs). His ability to reinterpret and deny the reality that he sees is profound, suggesting the strength of the legend of Jews bearing the menorah within his circles. Klausner’s eventual appointment to the chair of the History of the Second Temple at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem lent real (if undeserved) authority to his positions. *The History of the Second Temple* was the result of his lectures at the university—likely to the consternation of professional historians of Jewish antiquity such as Victor A. Tcherikover and Yohanan Hans Lewy, both of whom were members of the university’s faculty.<sup>51</sup> His impact upon the larger Zionist public, who sought historical roots for contemporary ideology—particularly those associated with the Zionist right—was significant. David Berger is quite correct, for better or worse, that “even one who reads Klausner’s *History* for the purpose of analyzing its ideological *Tendenz* cannot help but feel the deep pathos that informs his work, and there can be no question that readers were inspired, educators energized, students instructed, and public opinion molded.”<sup>52</sup> His significance for the continuing life of the myth of the menorah bearers should not be underestimated.

### *The Jewish Menorah Bearers and Jewish Visual Culture of the Fin de Siècle*

The first explicit example of this iconography was not, however, in Palestine or Europe, but in distant Los Angeles, where the New York-trained artist and movie set designer Hugo Ballin was commissioned

by Wilshire Boulevard Temple to paint the brilliantly colored “History of the Jews,” known as the Warner Memorial Murals, on the interior of the sanctuary. This work was overseen by Edgar F. Magnin, rabbi of this reform congregation—and funded by a prominent cinema family. The murals project a narrative of Jewish history from creation through a vision of “America holding forth the torch of Liberty,” certainly not a Zionist telling of the Jewish past, though Magnin was well aware of Zionist literature of the time. In addition, his assistant rabbi, Maxwell Dubin, had been a member of the Jewish Legion, and so certainly knew of the visual culture being developed in Palestine under the umbrella of the Bezalel School.<sup>53</sup> Illustrating the destruction of Jerusalem, Ballin painted images of Jewish captives, carrying the menorah into exile in an image inspired by the Arch of Titus, a larger than life Roman soldier on horseback conducts the procession forward (fig. 2). These images conform to preparatory notes prepared by Magnin for the artist: “SIEGE OF JERUSALEM UNDER TITUS\_ HEBREWS CARRIED CAPTIVE\_ THE MENORAH. Arch of Titus, Jews but no Romans,” and with Magnin’s description of the panel soon after its dedication: “The Jews march captive out of Jerusalem bearing a golden menorah or candlestick of the Temple.”<sup>54</sup> Ballin carefully mediated between the obviously Roman identity of the menorah bearers of the Arch of Titus reliefs and Magnin’s adamant instructions that the mural show “Jews but no Romans,” removing the wreaths from their heads and depicting a group of forlorn Jewish captives. Cleverly, he portrays the captives carrying the menorah out of Jerusalem, and not into Rome. By changing the venue, Ballin succeeded in using the imagery of the arch and yet identifying the menorah bearers as Jews—fulfilling the requirements set by Magnin.

The myth of the Jewish menorah bearers meshes well with the *fin de siècle* Jewish, and particularly Zionist, fascination with the arch menorah. This is apparent

<sup>51</sup> Myers, *Re-Inventing the Jewish Past*, esp. 138. A full, non-hagiographic study of Klausner’s life is a desideratum. In the meantime, see “Joseph Klausner,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 10: 1091–1096 and bibliography there.

<sup>52</sup> David Berger, “Maccabees, Zealots and Josephus: The Impact of Zionism on Joseph Klausner’s History of the Second Temple,” *Studies in Josephus and the Varieties of Ancient Judaism: Louis H. Feldman Jubilee Volume*, eds. Shaye J. D. Cohen and Joshua J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 27.

<sup>53</sup> Edgar F. Magnin, *The Warner Murals in the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Los Angeles, California* (Los Angeles: Wilshire Boulevard Temple, 1974), 42–43, 60–61. See William F. Kramer, “Hugo

Ballin: Artist and Director,” *A Crown for a King: Studies in Jewish Art, History and Archaeology in Memory of Stephen S. Kayser*, eds. S. Sabar, S. Fine, W. M. Kramer (Berkeley: Judah L. Magnes Museum and Jerusalem/New York: Gefen, 2000), 161–180. A letter from the American Consul General in London dated June 11, 1919 to Dubin and preserved in the Wilshire Boulevard Temple Archives refers to him as “Private M. H. Dubin, No. 6867. A Company, 38th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, Egyptian Expeditionary Force.” That is, the Jewish Legion.

<sup>54</sup> Wilshire Boulevard Temple Archive, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://wbtmurals.weebly.com/how-the-mural-was-made.html>. See also Kramer, “Hugo Ballin,” 166.



Fig. 2. Hugo Ballin, *Siege of Jerusalem under Titus, Hebrews Carried Captive, The Menorah*, Warner Murals, c.1929, Wilshire Boulevard Temple (Courtesy of Steven Fine).

especially in the art of the Bezalel School, the use of the arch menorah as symbol for the Jewish Legion during the last days of World War I (from whence it was adopted by the Revisionist movement), and continued through the development of imagery showing modern Jews carrying the menorah home to Jerusalem during the 1930s.<sup>55</sup> It brings together the Zionist call for self-emancipation with the energetic movement inherent in the Arch of Titus relief. In a sense, this imagery supersedes the visually parallel Bezalel icon of a somewhat-modernized Joshua and Caleb carrying the grape cluster on a pole over their shoulders (Numbers 13:23), with its inherent call to “Come and See Eretz Israel” with a statement of active Zionist redemption.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> For more on the Bezalel School, see On Ahad ha-Am, Asher Ginzberg, see: Steven J. Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

For more on the Revisionist moment, see Michael Keren and Shlomit Keren, *We are Coming, Unafraid: The Jewish Legions and the Promised Land in the First World War*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 6, 90. On the menorah and Zionist Revisionism, see the preliminary comments of Tamar Mayer, “National Symbols in Israel: Representation and Collective Memory,” in *National Symbols, Fractured Identities: Contesting the National Narrative*, ed. Michael E. Geisler (Middlebury VT: Middlebury College Press; Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2005), 12.

As far as I have determined, this imagery appeared a bit later in Palestine, in a poster designed in 1936 by artist Nahum Gutman for the *Keren ha-Yesod* (literally “The Foundation Fund”—in the United States, the Jewish National Fund) the funding wing of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, which shows a cross-section of young Palestinian Jews carrying the menorah, which is alight. Each of the flames is labeled to represent a Zionist virtue (fig. 3).<sup>57</sup> The menorah bearer at the center wears a *kippa* on his head and carries a book under his arm (a religious student), the bearer who stands before him carries a trowel (a farmer), and to the rear of the procession is a young Jewish man (pointedly, not a Roman) with a rifle. The youths carry the menorah

<sup>56</sup> Nurit Shilo-Cohen, ed., *Bezalel, 1906–1929* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1983), *passim* (Hebrew); Batsheva Goldman Ida, *Ze'ev Raban: A Hebrew Symbolist* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2001), 26, 63, 71, 72, 78, 83, 122, 153 (Hebrew); Mishory, *Lo and Behold*, 252–254. Working in the 1920's Ze'ev Raban was well aware that the menorah bearers were Roman. See Raban's depiction showing Romans carrying the menorah in his illustration for the Ninth of Av in Ze'ev Raban, and Avi-Shai (Levin Kipnis), *Hageinu: Sefer Temunot* (New York: Miller-Lynn, 1928), unpaginated (Hebrew).

<sup>57</sup> Nahum Gutman's poster is discussed somewhat differently by Batia Donner, “The Zionist Perspective in Keren Hayesod Posters,” *Keren Hayesod Sows—The Jewish People Reap: Keren Hayesod Posters 1920–2010*, ed. D. Tartakover (Jerusalem: Keren Hayesod, 2010), 31



Fig. 3. Nachum Gutmann, *Keren ha-Yesod* Fundraising Poster, c. 1936 (Courtesy of Yeshiva University Museum).

from right to left, reversing the left to right procession of the arch relief, subtly returning it to Jerusalem. The imagery emerges from the background, as a bas-relief from stone, subtly referencing the Arch of Titus panel. The iconography of this poster is one piece with the use of youths in government-sponsored social realist art that was then current in Italy, the Soviet Union and Germany—from which many in Jewish Palestine had so recently fled. Here the hammer, the sickle, the fasces and the swastika are replaced with a burden drawn from Jewish historical memory and carried by strong “Hebrew” youth of every ideological bent. The accompanying Hebrew text, written in a historicized script reminiscent of fonts used for religious texts, builds on the well-known language of the Hanukkah

liturgy and of Mishnah Shabbat, chapter 3, which was well-known for its liturgical use in Ashkenazi congregations each Sabbath eve.<sup>58</sup> The upper text proclaims “These lamps we light.” Below the menorah image is a rhetorical question and its answer: “With what shall we light it? Through our donations to the *Keren ha-Yesod*, the national tax for the building of the Land.” Donation and participation in the Zionist project is thus garbed in religious texts, and the notion of metaphorically reclaiming the arch menorah is given national sinews. This imagery became quite popular after the Arch of Titus menorah was incorporated within the national symbol in 1949, in a format that fits comfortably within the social realist canon.<sup>59</sup>

(Hebrew). Gutman returned to this theme in a modernist mode in his illustration to Yitzhak Lamdan's *Masada: Poema* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1954), unpaginated last page.

<sup>58</sup> *Seder Avodat Yisrael*, ed. Seligman Baer (Rödelheim: J. Lehrberger, 1868), 191–195, 440 (Hebrew).

<sup>59</sup> Mishory, *Lo and Behold*, 165–175, particularly the strident criticisms collected by Mishory, 159–161; Mishory, *The Jewish Art Scene in Israel, 1948–1949* (Sedeh Boker: Ben Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2013), 247–251 (Hebrew); Santo-Gardosh and Shamir *Lo Raq Semel*, 2011, esp. 34–38 and Meiri-Dann, “Art, Architecture and Politics.”



Fig. 4. Judaea Capta Coin, c. 70–96 CE. (Courtesy of David Hendin).

Beneath the surface of this strikingly interpretive stance, I think, is an approach to the primary evidence that might make a certain sense to later interpreters unaware of the semiotics of Roman art. Behind this resignification, it seems, is cognizance of the images of captive Jews—women and sometimes men—in various degrees of humiliation that appear on a broad range of coins minted across the empire from 70 through the death of Emperor Domitian in 96 CE. Appearing in gold, silver and bronze, these *Judaea Capta* issues celebrate Roman, but particularly Flavian, victory in the Jewish Revolt of 66–74 CE.<sup>60</sup> These coins were well known in Europe of the early modern period, where they were discussed and often published together with the Arch of Titus relief (fig. 4).<sup>61</sup> Later interpreters whom we have discussed—Christian and Jewish—were certainly aware of the *Judaea Capta* series and

many referenced them in their own studies. For Zionist iconographers during the first years of Israeli statehood, this parallel was especially pronounced, beginning with a medal designed at Bezalel by artist Boaz Takton.<sup>62</sup> This memento was ceremonially distributed to soldiers of the Jewish Legion as they set out to join the British Army in the summer of 1918 (fig. 5).<sup>63</sup> It shows the female personification of Judaea standing tall, her shackles not yet broken; the Roman soldier in flight. The Hebrew legend reads *יהודה משתחררת* “Judaea frees herself.” The medals were presented by Zionist leader Chaim Weitzman, who, referencing the Ninth of Av in a speech at the laying of the cornerstone of the Hebrew University on July 24, 1918 wrote: “But throughout the long centuries we, the stiff-necked people, have refused to acknowledge defeat, and ‘Judaea Capta’ is once more on the eve of triumph.”<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> This material is assembled by David Hendin, *Guide to Biblical Coins*, 5th edition (New York: Amphora, 2010), 403–470. Less well known are a bas-relief of similar iconography which graces the image of a Flavian arch in Rome, the “Arch of Isis,” as depicted on the “Sarcophagus of the Haterii,” Filippo Coarelli, *Divus Vespasianus Il bimillenario dei Flavi* (Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Soprintendenza speciale per i beni archeologici di Roma; Milan: Electa, 2009), 429, and sculptures supposed to be a Judaeans, each standing before a palm tree, from the *Templum Gentis Flaviae*, now at the Kelsey Museum of the University of Michigan. See: Gerhard M. Koeppl, “Fragments from a Domitianic Monument in Ann Arbor and Rome.” *Bulletin, Museums of Art and Archaeology, The University of Michigan* 3 (1980): 18–22.

<sup>61</sup> Early modern Italian rabbis were aware of coins of the First Jewish Revolt, though they imagined them to be of biblical origin. Azariah de-Rossi (d. 1578) describes discussions among rabbis of

his day, of the including one that rabbi who was shown images of Jewish coinage in a “trustworthy ancient book,” “by a Christian sage in Bologna.” Nonetheless, no Jewish source specifically mentions Judaea Capta issues. See: Azariah de Rossi, *Sefer Meor Anayim*, ed. D. Kessel (Vilna: Sh. Y. Fin, A. G. Rozenkrants, 1863–1865), *Imrei Binah* 56, 449–450; Moses Gaster, *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Mediaeval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha, and Samaritan Archaeology* (rpt. New York: Ktav, 1971), 600–613.

<sup>62</sup> The medal is signed בט בצלאל. See Shilo-Cohen, *Bezalel, 1906–1929*, 378.

<sup>63</sup> Ever Hadani (Aharon Feldman), *עם במלחמתו: שלושים שנות* (Tel-Aviv: Y. Sreberk, 1947), 104; Eliezer Morav, *Judaea Capta* (Israel: self-published, 2014), 50–51, (Hebrew).

<sup>64</sup> Chaim Weitzman, *American Addresses* (New York: Palestine Foundation Fund [Keren Hayesod], 1923), 58. See also 24–25.

Artist Meir Gur-Arie (Horodetzky) repeated this motif on a Jewish New Year's card published by Yaacov Ben Dov in 1919, with Judaea's chains broken (fig. 6), and Raban used it on the 1934 decorative tiles at Bialik House in Tel Aviv (fig. 7).<sup>65</sup> Numerous variations appear in a series of commemorative medals minted by the State of Israel beginning in 1958 and inspired by early kibbutznik turned numismatist Leo Kadman (Kaufmann, d. 1963).<sup>66</sup> Called *Israel Liberata*—the women, together with an Israeli man, stand proud.<sup>67</sup> The designers were, of course, well aware of the Arch of Titus. A series of pamphlets that accompanied these “Medals of Liberation,” as they are called, show Israeli soldiers superimposed upon the bas-relief escorting the menorah (fig. 8).<sup>68</sup> This association of the Jews on *Judaea Capta* coins with the “Jews” of the Arch of Titus was implicit, I believe, for most of the authors we have discussed. Weitzman's “refusal to admit defeat” is embedded deep in Jewish interpretations of the arch as well. While the identification of Jewish menorah bearers was conceptually plausible to early modern and some modern viewers, this interpretation would not have been imaginable—or at best would have been understood as highly poetic—to anyone steeped in Roman imperial iconography.

#### *Legend of the Jewish Menorah Bearers in Modern Israel*

The fifth-grade test with which I opened this essay is only a small, if government sanctioned, example of the presence of our myth in modern Israel. Museum exhibitions are an excellent place to see this, as museums sit at the meeting point of public education and academic culture. An educational panel at the Hecht Museum of the left-leaning University of Haifa, for example, shows the menorah being carried away from the Temple, Roman soldiers to the side (fig. 9). The caption above reads: “We are Jewish captives surrounded by Roman soldiers. We are carrying to Rome the treasures of our Temple that were despoiled by them.” A 2011 exhibi-

tion focusing on the symbol of the State of Israel in Israeli newspaper cartoons prominently displayed a photograph of the Arch of Titus panel. The accompanying catalog glossing this image makes the following interpretation:<sup>69</sup>

שבויים יהודיים נושאים שלל בית המקדש בתהלוכה לכבוד נצחוננו של טיטוס על יהודה בשנת 70.

Jewish prisoners carry the booty of the Temple in a procession honoring Titus's victory over Judaea in the year 70.

This notion is expressed in a number of cartoons displayed in the exhibition, including a well-known example from 1949, which shows the Israeli cabinet, led by David Ben Gurion, carrying the symbol of the state up to Jerusalem on their shoulders. Similarly, a major Israeli historian of the Second Temple period recently confided to me that before hearing my presentation on the arch, he had regularly identified the bearers of the menorah in the reproduction at the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv as Jewish captives. His “error” is not unusual, and is, in fact, reinforced by the museum's recently closed 1978 installation (fig. 10).<sup>70</sup> Visiting the *Beit Hatfutsot*, Diaspora Museum (recently rebranded as “The Museum of the Jewish People”), visitors enter a reception/orientation area built of full-sized faux ash-lars that represent the then-recently excavated remains of the Herodian Temple, strewn about to express ruin.<sup>71</sup> An oversized and partially restored reproduction of the Arch of Titus menorah panel is arrayed before them. The bearers of the Temple vessels on the right side of the panel are portrayed in far higher relief and are better articulated than in the original reliefs, while officiants to the left are far less articulated. Two sculptures of Roman soldiers stand beside of the panel to the left, adding three-dimensionality, as does a bench immediately before the panel that serves as an orientation area. These elements of the Arch of Titus installation have the effect of moving the procession of ancients and the throngs of museum visitors toward the main hall and into the exhibitions devoted to Exile.

<sup>65</sup> For more on Meir Gur-Arie's Jewish New Year's card, see Shilo-Cohen, *Bezalet, 1906–1929*, 370.

For more on Raban's decorative tiles, see Morav, *Judaea Capta*, 50–51; Mishory, *Lo and Behold*, 202–214, esp. 213–214.

<sup>66</sup> Morav, *Judaea Capta*; 123.

<sup>67</sup> See Mishory, 213–214; Morav, *Judaea Capta*, passim.

<sup>68</sup> Morav, *Judaea Capta*, 77, 78, 91, 92.

<sup>69</sup> Daniyelah Santo-Gardosh and Yoram A. Shamir, *Lo Rak Semel: Semel ha-Medinah be-Karikaturah* (Holon: Israel Cartoon Museum, 2011), 32 (Hebrew); Yaakov Meshorer, *TestiMoney* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2000), 43.

<sup>70</sup> Early Diaspora Museum publications, as well as wall labels, are non-committal as to the identities of the menorah bearers (e.g. Joan Comay, *The Diaspora Story: The Epic of the Jewish People among the Nations* [New York: Random House, 1981], 8: “The holy vessels from the destroyed Temple are carried in triumphal procession” [emphasis added]). Cf. Israel J. Yuval, “Mithos ha-Haglayah min ha-Aretz—Zeman Yehudi ve-Zeman Notsri,” *Alpayim* 29 (2005): 5 (Hebrew).

<sup>71</sup> See: Benjamin Mazar, *The Mountain of the Lord: Excavating in Jerusalem* (New York: Doubleday, 1975).





Fig. 5. Boaz Takton/Bezalel, *Jewish Legion Medal*, 1918. (Courtesy of Ira Rezak).



Fig. 6. Meir Gur-Arie (Horodetzky), *Jewish New Year's Card*, 1919. Published by Yaacov Ben Dov. (Courtesy of Ira Rezak).



Fig. 7. Ze'ev Raban, Decorative Tiles, Bialik House, Tel Aviv, 1934. (Wikipedia Commons).



Fig. 8. Pamphlet accompanying the Israel Liberation Medal, 1958. Israel Government Coins and Medals.



Fig. 9. Educational Panel, Hecht Museum, Haifa, 2013. (Photograph by Steven Fine).



Fig. 10. Entry Hall, Diaspora Museum, Tel Aviv, 1978. (Photograph by Steven Fine).

The composition may reference a bas-relief of Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto monument (1948) that shows German soldiers moving their beleaguered Jewish prisoners forward (fig. 11), which itself clearly takes a page from Samuel Hirzenberg's influential painting *Galut, Exile* (fig. 12).<sup>72</sup> Yiddishist David Roskies suggests that Hirszenberg consciously built upon images of the exiled Jews of the Arch of Titus.<sup>73</sup> Jewish partisan and Israeli poet Abba Kovner, a leader of the leftist *Hashomer Hatzair* Zionist movement "created the museum concept of the permanent exhibition," making this connection all the more likely.<sup>74</sup> In fact, the entire museum was designed as an homage to a world passed by, with a Holocaust installation, called the "Pillar of Fire," at its very core—and if I am correct, opening with a hint of *Hurban Europa*, "the Destruction of Europe," as the Holocaust is called in Yiddish, that draws from the national ur-catastrophe, *Hurban Beit ha-Miqdash*, the "Destruction of the Temple" by Titus.

The next hall begins with an array of images of Jews, modern and historic members of the Jewish "family."<sup>75</sup> While the "menorah bearers" are not identified explicitly, the sense of walking into Exile together with the sacred vessels and their bearers is implicit.<sup>76</sup> This movement is mirrored in the final gallery of the museum, which enacts ascent to Zion, the final

image being that of a menorah. Historian of modern Judaism, Conservative rabbi and former Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Ismar Schorsch, narrates:

The permanent exhibition of the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv begins with a replica of the relief from the Arch of Titus depicting Jewish prisoners bearing Temple artifacts (a large seven-branched menorah, for example) into exile. Nearby a piece of signage [citing Abba Kovner] unfurls the Museum's conception of Jewish history: "This is the story of a people which was scattered over all the world and yet remained a single family; a nation which time and again was doomed to destruction and yet out of ruins, rose to new life." These stirring words attest to an unbroken national will to live. Exile did not end Jewish history nor fragment Jewish unity. Shared consciousness made up for the lack of proximity.<sup>77</sup>

The myth of the Jewish menorah bearers is so ingrained even among scholars that this explanation appears in the official 2002 guidebook to Rome by *Merkaz Zalman Shazar*, the Historical Society of Israel, no less.<sup>78</sup> While this legend does not appear in contemporary Israeli discourse among scholars of antiquity, it thrives just below the surface, where it "lives" in a wide array of secondary and derivative literature—and is assumed

<sup>72</sup> James E. Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument," *Representations* 26, Special Issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory* (Spring, 1989): 69–106; Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 219–225.

For more on Fig. 12., Hirzenberg's work as a holiday greeting card, see Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Jews as Postcards, or Postcards as Jews. Mobility in a Modern Genre," *JQR* 99 (2009): 512–513, 542–545.

<sup>73</sup> David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 276–280. See also Richard I. Cohen, *Jewish Icons: Art and Society in Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 217–236.

<sup>74</sup> Beit Hatfutsot: The Museum of the Jewish People, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.bh.org.il/about-us/founders/>; Galia Bar-Or, "Our Life Requires Art": *Art Museums in the Kibbutzim, 1930–1960* (Sedeh Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2010), 17–18 (Hebrew); Dina Porat, "Kovner, Abba," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, accessed August 20, 2014, [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kovner\\_Abba](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kovner_Abba).

<sup>75</sup> A descriptive wall panel read: "Behind the variety in these faces lies a common heritage: The Jewish family tradition and the Jewish way of life."

<sup>76</sup> See the item for Beit Hatfutsot on the Hebrew Wikipedia, accessed August 20, 2014, ([http://he.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA\\_%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%AA](http://he.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA_%D7%94%D7%AA%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%AA)), which makes this connection explicitly in describing this installation:

בכניסה למוזיאון נחשף המבקר לשחזור הראשון—אבנים גדולות ומפוארות, שרידים מן המתחם ההרודיאני הגדול שהקיף את הר הבית ונהרס בחורבן בשנת 70 לספירה. בהמשך ניצב שחזור נוסף ובהקשר דומה: תבליט מן הקיר הדרומי של "שער טיטוס" ברומא, המנציח את תהלוכת הניצחון שהתקיימה לציון דיכוי המרד הגדול של היהודים ברומאים. בתמונה נראים שבויים יהודים הנושאים את מנורת בית המקדש שנבזזה לאחר שחרב הבית. המנורה—סמל הריבונות היהודית—נישאת במרכז. האירוע מסמן את תחילת הגלות...

<sup>77</sup> Ismar Schorsch, "Judaism as a Relationship," *Jewish Theological Seminary of America*, 1997, accessed August 20, 2014 <http://learn.jtsa.edu/content/commentary/yitro/5757/judaism-relationship>.

<sup>78</sup> Merkaz Zalman Shazar. *Sights & Sites: A Guide to Jewish Sites in Italy* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2002, 87. (Hebrew).



Fig 11. Nathan Rapoport, Warsaw Ghetto Monument, Warsaw, Poland, 1948. (Photograph by Steven Fine).



Fig. 12. Samuel Hirzenberg, Rosh Hashanah Post card based on the earlier painting, *Galut, Exile*, 1898–1904, postcard c. 1912.



Fig. 13. Nathan Rapoport, *Scrolls of Fire*, Judean Hills, Israel 1971. (Photograph by Steven Fine).

to be correct by more than one scholar of the modern period.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time that the Diaspora Museum was in development, Rapoport, whose iconic work was undoubtedly well known to Kovner, and who travelled in the same leftist *Hashomer Hatzair* circles, expressed the notion of the Jewish menorah bearers in his massive bronze *Scrolls of Fire*. Set off on a lonely mountaintop in the Holocaust “B’nai B’rith Martyr’s Forest” in Mount Kasalon in the Judean Hills, this

sculpture was funded by B’nai B’rith International (fig. 13), after a version was rejected for public display by the monuments committee of the City of New York. It is an unusual piece for Israel, where public sculpture of human figures is very uncommon due to religious concerns. Completed in 1971 in the euphoria after the Six-Day War, one of the menorah bearers resembles Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan.<sup>80</sup>

A second version, funded by the same American donor who made the *Pillar of Fire* and the Yad Vashem

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Haim Grossman, “Israel Haggadah Forces’: The Image of the Soldier and Military Appearance in the Passover Haggadah,” *Mo’ed: Annual for Jewish Studies* 15 [New Series 3] (2005): 197–198 (Hebrew); Alek Mishory, *Lo and Behold: Zionist Icons and Visual Symbols in Israeli Culture* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000), 167 (Hebrew); Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 276–280; David G. Roskies, Naomi Diamant, *Holocaust Literature: A History*

*and Guide* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 93; Seth L. Wolitz, *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Y. Gitelman (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 173.

<sup>80</sup> Richard Yaffe, *Nathan Rapoport Sculptures and Monuments* (New York: Shengold, 1980), unpaginated; Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 219–225. Mishory, *Lo and Behold*, 195–196.

version of the Warsaw Ghetto monument possible, appears in a far more accessible—and sculpturally diverse environment—on the façade of New York’s Park Avenue Synagogue. The menorah is borne by a “sabrá,” a member of “the Israel Underground which liberated the country from the British,” and an Israeli soldier. Angels sounding trumpets (drawn from the Arch of Titus?) escort them above, proclaiming, as Rapoport himself described it: “I [God] brought back the menorah which is the symbol of redemption”—all within the context of a Holocaust memorial. As in Gutman’s poster, the menorah is carried in the opposite direction of the Arch of Titus relief, and thus returns the lampstand to Jerusalem. Rapoport described his intention:

‘What I have done,’ Rapoport says, pointing to a sketch of the memorial, ‘is to symbolize the martyrdom and redemption. You see the menorah coming back to Jerusalem from the Arch of Titus, which was put up in Rome to commemorate the defeat of the Jews and whose inscriptions says that Israel would not rise again. It is Titus’s Rome that is in ruins, and it is Israel that has survived and is building.’<sup>81</sup>

The American context responded not only to Israeli developments, but had a distinctly local frame of reference. The Jewish menorah bearers were a centerpiece of an early protest march of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, led by Jacob Birnbaum, and fueled both by the Six Day War and the American Civil Rights Movement. Birnbaum, ever cognizant of Jewish themes of redemption in each of the early SSSJ events, staged his Hanukkah event, the “Menorah March,” and rally in Central Park on 19 December 1966, just a few years before Rapoport’s sculpture was set in place nearby.<sup>82</sup> The menorah bearers bore their lampstand on their shoulders on two planks, likely so as to resemble the Arch of Titus relief (fig. 14). Birnbaum was clearly cognizant of this visual parallel, as he was almost certainly aware of the myth of the Jewish menorah bearers. This

urban myth is widespread in the Washington Heights Orthodox community in which he lived; appears periodically in popular Jewish media and occasionally even in American Jewish educational materials.<sup>83</sup>

#### *The Jewish Menorah Bearers in Contemporary Israel*

Though the examples cited so far reflect a perception which—while historically incorrect—is somewhat innocuous and even inspiring (Jewish parallels to, say, George Washington’s cherry tree or Paul Revere and the Minutemen at Concord and Lexington), not every appearance is so innocuous. In the days before the evacuation of Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip in 2005, the well-known designer of Israel government stamps and medals, Aharon Shevo, published a protest poster showing the Arch of Titus panel. The panel is rolled like a scroll on its lower edge and the legs of the men carrying the menorah are replaced with those of Israeli soldiers. Below is written in Hebrew the Jewish date, *Tisha be-Av, 5765*—an association clearly sparked by the Israeli government’s ill-considered and religiously tone-deaf decision to begin the evacuation of Gaza on the day after this fast commemorating the destruction of the Temple—the very day on which, according to Josephus (*Jewish War* 6.249–250), the Temple shrine was destroyed (fig. 15). According to Shevo, the poster represents the Jews carrying the menorah into exile, and Israeli soldiers (who by sectarian definition are not “Jews”) forcing the “Jews” of our own day, those of Gush Katif, into “exile” from their homes—the secular state interfering in the messianic process of redemption, and thusly it has been used in Israeli political discourse. This interpretation is not necessarily “obvious” from the iconography itself.<sup>84</sup> One interpreter explains that “Shevo’s 2005 Tisha B’Av poster shows the image of Jews in defeat following the fall of the Temple in 70 CE (as portrayed on the Arch of Titus)—being superseded by the victories achieved by Israel’s modern army.”<sup>85</sup> This interpretation is in line

<sup>81</sup> Yaffe, *Nathan Rapoport*, unpaginated.

<sup>82</sup> The documents of this campaign are preserved in Yeshiva University Archives, Jacob Birnbaum Archive, Box 1, file 14.

<sup>83</sup> This observation is based upon discussions with nearly twenty-long time residents of this Manhattan Jewish enclave, all between the ages of 70–90. Alas, Birnbaum died in 2014, and was unable to discuss this issue with me himself.

For educational materials that reflect this perspective, see, for example, Leo Trepp, *A History of the Jewish Experience* (New York: Behrman House, 2006), 81; Thomas Sheehan, “*Specialità Ebraiche: The Story of Rome’s Jews*,” *Moment* 7.2 (1982): 40; Wally Leaf,

“Rome Sweet Rome,” *The Jewish Chronicle* (London) March 9, 1999, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://website.thejc.com/home.aspx?AId=5398&ATypeId=1&search=true2&srchstr=arch%20of%20titus&srchtxt=0&srchhead=1&srchauthor=0&srchsandp=0&scsrch=0>; Erica Brown, “When In Rome,” *The New York Jewish Week*, July 29, 2014, accessed August 20, 2014 <http://www.thejewishweek.com/editorial-opinion/jew-voice/when-rome>.

<sup>84</sup> Many thanks to David Sperber and Noa Lea Cohen for emphasizing this point to me.

<sup>85</sup> Mel Wachs, “Aharon Shevo: Depth in Design,” *The Shekel* 46, nos. 2–3 (2013): 48.



Fig. 14. Advertising Poster for the "Menorah March," December 19, 1966. (Jacob Birnbaum Archive, Yeshiva University Archives).



Fig. 15. Aharon Shevo, *Tisha be-Av*, 5765, 2005. (Courtesy of Steven Fine).





Fig. 16. *Eikha—Whence?!*, poster containing Aharon Shevo's *Tisha be-Av*, 5765. (Courtesy of Steven Fine).

with the interpretation intended for the pamphlets that accompanied the “Medal of Liberation”—the standard against which Shevo responds. Shevo’s attempt to subvert long-standing Israeli icons is not successful. It is important to note that the historicity of this identification is far less significant to Shevo than the power of the myth. During our interview, Shevo asked me if the panel in fact represents Jews or Romans.

The uses to which Shevo’s image was put during the Gaza withdrawal included a poster calling on soldiers during the Tisha be-Av fast to refuse to participate in the evacuation of Gaza, and also providing hotline numbers for support. The accompanying text well expresses the spirit of Shevo’s image, connecting the events of 2005 to this iconic Jewish tragedy (fig. 16):

*Eikha—Whence?!<sup>86</sup>*

2000 years ago Jews were exiled from their land,  
Settlements in the Land of Israel were destroyed.

Then this was done by Romans.

Jewish soldier!

Do you want to join them?

This is not why you enlisted!

Days later, the Jews of Netzarim, the last Gaza settlement to be evacuated, ceremonially removed a large menorah from the roof of their synagogue and carried it back to Israeli territory (eventually, to the Western Wall) on their backs, imitating the Arch of Titus frieze.<sup>87</sup> Before them, an elder with a large beard, followed by a larger group, one man carrying a Torah scroll—taking a page from Hirzenberg’s *Galut, Exile*, in its rendition in the Nathan Rapoport’s Warsaw Ghetto memorial (both in Warsaw and in its iteration at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem)—and the introductory panel of the Diaspora Museum. The marchers of Gush Katif may also have had in mind the well-known image of the capture of an Israeli soldier at the Suez Canal

<sup>86</sup> A reference to Lam 1:1, a phrase repeated throughout the Tisha be-Av liturgy. Lamentations is read liturgically in the synagogue two times on Tisha be-Av. See Max Landsberg, “Ab, Ninth Day of,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1: 23–24.

<sup>87</sup> Video of this event may be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csXO9wQxtMA>, accessed May 30, 2015.



Fig. 17. Aharon Shevo, *We Will Not Forget*, 2005. (Photograph by Steven Fine).

by Egyptian forces in October 1973, carrying a Torah scroll with him.<sup>88</sup> This march in turn became the basis of a broad iconographic program designed by Shevo, on stamps, medals, and coins (fig. 17).<sup>89</sup> He similarly produced an inversion of the *Israel Liberata* medal.<sup>90</sup> Shevo read the “exile” from Gaza as a reflection of the paradigmatic “exile” of the Arch of Titus, suggesting that the State of Israel is the new Roman oppressor of the “real” Jews.<sup>91</sup>

Shevo’s work responds directly to that of the politically leftist and renowned Tel Aviv designer David Tartakover. A small copy of Tartakover’s well-known poster lamenting the 1995 murder of Yitzchak Rabin, labeled in Hebrew “We will not forget, We will not forgive” hangs beneath an image of Shevo’s own poster on a door in his studio (fig. 18).<sup>92</sup> In the aftermath of the Gaza withdrawal, Shevo chose the same rubric for his own rightist response to the withdrawal, a central

icon of which is a ripped Shield of David, within which is portrayed the menorah procession of Netzarim.<sup>93</sup> In fact, in 2002 Tartakover himself reversed the Arch of Titus content as a protest against rightist government policies in a poster entitled “Triumphal Arch” (fig. 19).<sup>94</sup> Arch of Titus imagery is thus well established on both sides of the Israeli political spectrum, where figurative possession of the arch is a potent national symbol.

This interest in historical continuity is all the more so on the radical right of Israeli culture. In 2008, Rabbi Yisrael Ariel attempted to provide a patina of academic rigor to this notion in his beautifully produced volume, *Menorat Zahav Tahor* “The Menorah of Pure Gold,” published by The Temple Institute.<sup>95</sup> The intent of this rabbinic study of the menorah is not just scholastic. This volume is an accompaniment to the construction of an actual seven-branched menorah, which The Temple Institute conceives as a practical step in

<sup>88</sup> This image appears at, “The Yom Kippur War,” (Hebrew), accessed May 30, 2015, <http://www.nahal.co.il/Web/Battles/Wars/War1973/Default.aspx>. Many thanks to Isaiah Gafni for bringing this image to my attention.

<sup>89</sup> Dror Eydar, “The Door’s Keepers: About ‘Exclusion’ and the Politicization of the Aesthetic in the Discourse of Israeli Art,” *Protocols: History and Theory* 10 (2008) (Hebrew); accessed August 20, 2014, <http://bezalel.secured.co.il/zope/home/he/1220527665/1220527733>; Wachs, “Aharon Shevo.”

<sup>90</sup> Morav, *Judaea Capta*, 52.

<sup>91</sup> See also Joseph Tabory, “The Prayer for the State of Israel,” in *Liturgy and the Life of the Synagogue*, eds. Ruth Langer and Steven Fine (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 225–246.

<sup>92</sup> Eydar, “The Door’s Keepers.”

<sup>93</sup> Illustrated in Wachs, “Aharon Shevo,” 45.

<sup>94</sup> Naomi Meiri-Dann, “Art, Architecture and Politics in Triumphal Arches during the Twentieth Century,” *Protocols: History and Theory* 10 (2008), (Hebrew) accessed August 20, 2014, [http://bezalel.secured.co.il/zope/home/1220527665/1220873833?curr\\_issue=1220527665](http://bezalel.secured.co.il/zope/home/1220527665/1220873833?curr_issue=1220527665)

<sup>95</sup> Yisrael Ariel, *Menorat Zahav Tahor* (Jerusalem: The Temple Institute, 2008), 166–167 (Hebrew).



Fig. 18. David Tartakover, "We Will Not Forget, We Will Not Forgive," 1995. (Photograph by Steven Fine).



Fig. 19. David Tartakover, *Triumphal Arch*, 2002. (Courtesy of David Tartakover).



Fig. 20. Temple Institute Menorah, 2013. (Photograph by Steven Fine).

the building of the third temple, an ominous development, in light of Ariel's leadership in the Jewish radical right.<sup>96</sup> Ariel argues strenuously for the historical veracity of the Arch of Titus reliefs, which are important for his menorah (fig. 20). This model, with its Arch of Titus inspired base, allows The Temple Institute to associate its project with the symbol of modern Israel, adding symbolic national significance to their project. Ariel lists four proofs for the Jewish identities of the menorah

bearers, suggesting that those carrying the menorah are Jews bowing under the weight of the menorah and the table, and are shorter than the two alleged Romans, who wear full-length togas and are themselves taller than the "Jews." Astonishingly, Ariel argues that the "Jews" walk with walking sticks, which he explains in terms of the late medieval, mostly Christian legend of the "wandering Jew."<sup>97</sup> During Hanukkah 2009, Ariel's Temple Institute moved their menorah to its

<sup>96</sup> Sarina Chen, *Between Poetics and Politics: Vision and Praxis in Current Activity to Construct the Third Temple*. (Ph.D. diss., Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007) (Hebrew); Gershon, Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?* trans. Shaul Vardi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). Ariel joined a group of rabbis in threatening United States Secretary of State John Kerry

with divine wrath for his 2014 peace initiative. See Gavriel Fiske, "Right-Wing Rabbis Compare Kerry to Titus and Haman," *Times of Israel*, February 5, 2014, accessed August 20, 2014 <http://www.timesofisrael.com/right-wing-rabbis-compare-kerry-to-titus-and-haman/#ixzz2sTTRgT9o>.

<sup>97</sup> Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Wandering Jew," *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions*, eds. Raphael Patai and Haya Bar-Itzhak (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 2013) 2: 557–559.

present location overlooking (מול) the Temple Mount, ominously overlooking the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque on the eastern ascent to the Jewish Quarter (in a spot renamed “Menorah Square”).<sup>98</sup> Well attuned to the theatrical possibilities of this messianic project, at the end of this procession two horns similar to those portrayed on the arch were ceremonially sounded before the menorah.<sup>99</sup>

The legend of the Jewish menorah bearers reappeared again in the Spring of 2014, in preparation for the visit of Pope Francis to Israel in May. A Jerusalem rabbi, Yonatan Shtencel, wrote to the Apostolic Nuncio in Israel, Archbishop Guiseppe Lazzarotto demanding the return of the menorah and other Temple vessels. This is an urban myth dating only to the second half of the twentieth century, which has had a prominent place in Israeli and Jewish folklore since the first moves toward warmer relations between the Vatican and the State of Israel in 1996.<sup>100</sup> Shtencel received a polite response from the Archbishop promising to follow up on any leads that the rabbi might provide. Unsatisfied, Shtencel attempted to convince Israeli president Shimon Peres to request the menorah’s return from the Vatican during his June 9, 2014 prayer meeting with Pope Francis and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the Vatican. Among his spurious proofs that the menorah is at the Vatican, Shtencel writes that:

שער טיטוס הידוע שם טיטוס הנציח את ההישג שלו בו רואים  
יהודים  
נושאים את מנורת המקדש לרומא

The well known Arch of Titus there [in Rome]: Titus immortalized his gains.  
There we see Jews bearing the menorah to Rome.

<sup>98</sup> Ariel, *Menorat Zahav Tahor*, 188; “Ha’avarat ha-Menorah me-ha-Kardo,” accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihaLKaDFhRA>.

<sup>99</sup> For more on the theatrical possibilities of this project, see Ariel, *Menorat Zahav Tahor*, 188.

For more on the ceremonial horns, see another video, filmed on Hanukkah 2013, entitled “Rabbi Yisrael Ariel Conducts Holy Temple Menorah Lighting Rehearsal.” In which, Ariel promises the assembled crowd that a large purpose-built wooden seven-branched menorah is suitable for use in the Temple “this very evening.” A priest, in full regalia, is shown next to the menorah and recites a blessing based upon the Hanukkah liturgy, using its tune: ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו בקדושתו של אהרן וצונו להדליק מנורת המקדש “Blessed are you, Lord (*Hashem*) our God, King of the Universe, who has commanded us, through the sanctity of Aaron, to light the menorah of the Temple” (accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmI2yL7XKMo>).

<sup>100</sup> Fine, *Art, History*, 63–86.

Admittedly a fringe player, Shtencel’s claims nonetheless found considerable coverage in the Jewish Orthodox press.<sup>101</sup> This is not the case, however, of the government-paid Rabbi of the Western Wall, Rabbi Shalom Rabinovitch, who delivered a short address to Pope Francis during his visit to the Western Wall. According to Rabbi Rabinovitch:

על גבי קשת הניצחון שבנה טיטוס לרגל ניצחונו על העם היהודי וחורבנו של בית המקדש בירושלים, מופיע תחריט מפורסם ובו שבויים יהודים נושאים לגלות את כלי המקדש

On the triumphal arch that Titus built to commemorate his victory over the Jewish people and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the famous carving appears that shows Jews carrying the vessels of the Temple into exile...<sup>102</sup>

### Concluding Comments

What, then, are the implications of this fascinatingly complex and deeply-rooted legend? Like Ibn Yahya before them, Zionists of the *fin de siècle* adopted the Arch of Titus—especially the menorah panel—and subverted it. No longer was it to be a sign of Roman victory and Jewish defeat—the original intention of the arch—but rather it was transformed into a symbol of Jewish strength. It was a “refusal to admit defeat,” as Chaim Weitzman so succinctly put it. This resignification is almost Purim-esque in its seriousness, allowing a subjugated population to imagine the possibilities of its own strength in the face of European power, read through a marble metaphor of ancient Roman imperialism.<sup>103</sup> This recourse to an ancient artifact spoke to both Jewish proclivities and

<sup>101</sup> Nesanel Gantz, “The Vanished Vessels of the *Beis Hamikdash*: The Vatican Responds to the Claim that the Church has our Holy Keilim in its Possession,” *Ami Magazine*, November 27, 2013, 119–126; Shimon Cohen, “Claim: Vatican Hoarding Second Temple Vessels: Rabbi Claims that Pope Francis Knows Full Well Where Jewish Religious Objects are Being Kept is Hiding them to Avoid Legal Consequences,” *Arutz Sheva: israelnationalnews.com*, May 28, 2014, accessed August 20, 2014, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/181146#U88tsvldUII>; “Menorah Myth Busters: Students in Yeshiva College Summer Course Discredit Claim That Vatican is Hiding Temple Relics,” accessed August 20, 2014, <http://blogs.yu.edu/news/2014/07/28/menorah-myth-busters/>

<sup>102</sup> Dalia Mazori, Assaf Gibbur and Yair Krauss, *nrg.org*, May 25, 2014, “haApifior be-Yad Vashem: Hatanu, le-Olam lo od,” accessed May 20, 2016, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/581/114.html>

<sup>103</sup> My analysis is deeply influenced by Elliott Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence: Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

to Enlightenment romanticism. The “martyred race” (as Jews were often called during the *fin de siècle*) was actually “a strong nation.” This “hidden transcript” was surely a poignant survival tool for early modern Italian Jews. It was developed by Anglophone Protestants of the Victorian era for their own theological and poetic purposes. And, finally, was adapted by modern Jews as they began the processes of imagining themselves a modern “secular” nation—and then seeing that nation take shape. Taken over into Israeli popular culture, it has been preserved among Hebrew speakers, and Italian and American Jews. In recent decades, this legend of the downtrodden has been turned on its head, as the legend of the Jewish menorah bearers has been adopted by Israel’s apocalyptic right as a marker of dissatisfaction with decisions of the elected government that have resulted in territorial adjustments with the Palestinians and thus deviation from their messianic agenda. The history of the reception of the Arch of Titus over

a very *longue durée* by the very people whose defeat is celebrated and chronicled nearly 2,000 years before is unique in Western cultural studies. The historiography of the Arch of Titus is a point of departure for viewing similarly active—almost radioactive—“places of memory” in our own “post-modern” world.<sup>104</sup>

#### Bio

Steven Fine is the Dean Pinkhos Churgin Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University, where he is also director of the Arch of Titus Project and the YU Center for Israel Studies. Fine’s *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (2005; rev. ed. 2010) received the Association for Jewish Studies Jordan Schnitzer Book Award in 2009. Fine’s *Art, History and the Historiography of Judaism in Roman Antiquity* appeared in 2013. His *The Menorah: From the Bible to Modern Israel* was published by Harvard University Press in 2016.

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<sup>104</sup> Compare Nora’s conception of “lieux de mémoire.” Nora asserts a residual modern attachment to such sites that is fundamentally different from pre-modern attachments. See Nora, “Between Memory and History,” esp. 24.